

Chapter Eleven

Interest Groups

Why Interest Groups are Common

- **Interest group:** any organization that seeks to influence public policy
- Many kinds of cleavages in the country mean that there are many different interests

Why Interest Groups are Common

- The Constitution provides many access points to government
- Political parties are weak so interests work directly on government

Kinds of Organizations

- **Institutional Interests:** individuals or organizations representing other organizations
- **Membership Interests:** Americans join some groups more frequently than citizens in other nations

Table 11.1: Dates of Founding of Organizations Having Washington Offices

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Organization	Percentage Founded	
	After 1960	After 1970
Corporations	14%	6%
Unions	21	14
Professional	30	14
Trade	38	23
Civil rights	56	46
Women/elderly/disabled	56	46
"Public interest"	76	57
Social welfare	79	51

Source: Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 76. Copyright © 1986 by Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney. Reprinted by permission of Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc.

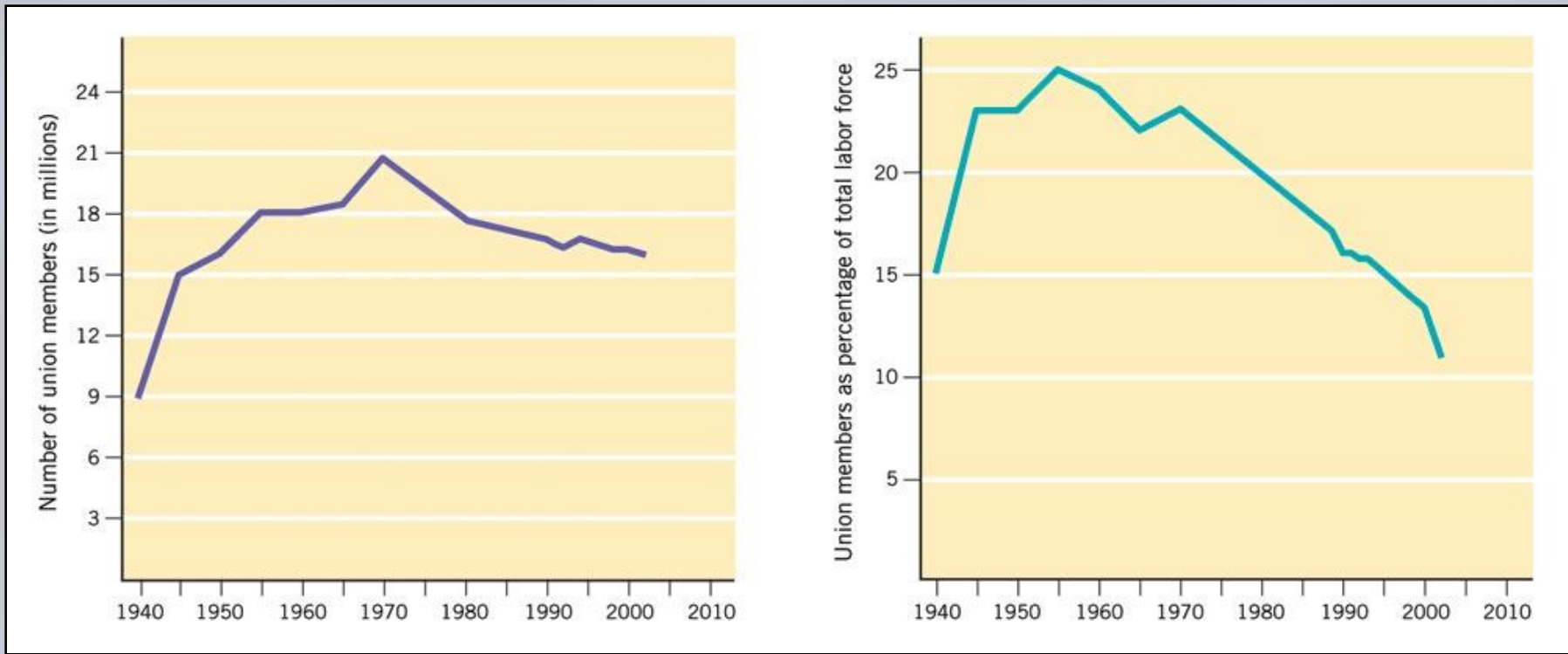
Incentives to Join

- Solidary incentives—pleasure, companionship
- Material incentives—money, things, services
- Purposive incentives—goal/purpose of the organization itself

Social Movements

- **Social movement:** a widely shared demand for change in the social or political order, either liberal or conservative
- Examples include the environmental and feminist movements
- Unions continued activism after their social movement died, but sustaining membership is difficult

Figure 11.1: The Decline in Union Membership



Historical Statistics of the United States, vol. 1, 178; Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1998, 444; U.S. Census Bureau; Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2003, 432, 433.

Funds for Interest Groups

- Foundation grants
 - One study found that 1/3 of public interest lobbying groups received more than half of all their funds from foundation grants
- Federal grants and contracts
 - Expansion of federal grants in 1960s and 1970s benefited interest groups; cutbacks in 1980s hurt them

Funds for Interest Groups

- Direct mail: through the use of computers, mail is sent directly to a specialized audience
- But this approach is also expensive—it must generate checks from at least 2 percent of the people contacted

The Problem of Bias

- Those who are more affluent are more likely to join and be active
- Business/professional groups are more numerous and better financed than those representing minorities, consumers, or the disadvantaged

Limits on Elite Influence

- Elites have input in the political system but do not control who eventually wins or loses on particular issues
- Business groups are often divided among themselves

Activities of Interest Groups

- Supplying credible information is the single most important tactic of interest groups
- Insider strategy: face-to-face contact between lobbyist and member or Hill staff
- Outsider strategy: grassroots mobilization of the public

Activities of Interest Groups

- Lobbyists' key targets: the undecided legislator or bureaucrat
- Some groups attack their likely allies to embarrass them
- Some groups try for grassroots support

Money and PACs

- **PAC:** a committee set up to raise and spend money on campaigns and candidates
- Money is the least effective way to influence politicians
- The campaign finance reform law of 1973 restricted donations
- The rapid growth in PACs has probably not led to vote buying

Money and PACs

- Ideological PACs raise more money, but raising the money also consumes it, so less is available to give to campaigns and candidates
- In 2003-2004, unions and business or professional organizations gave the most
- Incumbents get the most PAC money

Table 11.3: Spending by Political Action Committees (PACs), 2003-2004*

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Committee	Contribution
National Association of Realtors	\$2,106,733
National Beer Wholesalers Association	1,994,500
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	1,714,900
National Association of Homebuilders	1,700,700
Association of Trial Lawyers of America	1,668,499
United Parcel Service, Inc.	1,592,160
National Automobile Dealers Association	1,547,100
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.	1,484,000
Credit Union Legislative Action Council	1,428,705
Service Employees International Union	1,411,500

*January 1, 2003, through June 30, 2004.

Source: Federal Election Commission.

Money and Influence

- There is no systematic evidence that PAC money influences votes in Congress
- Most members vote in line with their ideology and with their constituents

Money and Influence

- When an issue is of little concern to voters and ideology provides little guidance, there is a slight correlation between PAC contributions and votes
- PAC money may influence politics in other ways, like access or committee actions

The “Revolving Door”

- Federal government workers leave to take more lucrative positions in private industry (lobbying, consulting, executive positions)
- This may give private interests a way to improperly influence government decisions

Regulating Interest Groups

- A 1995 act provided a broader definition of lobbying and tightened reporting requirements
- Tax code; nonprofits lose tax-exempt status if a “substantial part” of their activities involve lobbying
- Campaign-finance laws limit donations by individual PACs